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SUBJECT: QATARI LEADERSHIP SEEKS TO SHOW ACTIVISM ON GAZA

REF: 2008 DOHA 888

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(U) KEY POINTS  
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-- An estimated 15,000 people gathered at a local stadium January 1 to show their solidarity with the Palestinians of Gaza. Participants were encouraged to contribute money for humanitarian assistance to Qatar Charity, one of the event's sponsors.

-- A delegation of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) headed by prominent cleric (and Al Jazeera star) Yousef Al-Qaradawi left Qatar on an Amiri plane to meet with leaders of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Syria and Jordan and rally support for ending the hostilities in Gaza.

-- Citing the need for Qatar's Prime Minister/Foreign Minister to travel to New York for UN discussions on Gaza, the government postponed by a week the January 5 Arab and African foreign ministers' meeting that was scheduled as part of Qatar's mediation of the crisis in Darfur, a high-profile foreign policy undertaking.

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(SBU) COMMENT  
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-- The Amir's plan to convene an emergency Arab League Summit in Doha January 2 (reftel) having been thwarted by other members of the Arab League, the Amir continues to convey that Qatar is one Arab country that wants action on Gaza.

-- While the stadium event may have been designed to let the local population blow off steam in a controlled environment, local media noted that the rally's participants -- and local cell phone subscribers who received text messages encouraging contributions to Gaza -- are donating money for humanitarian relief.

-- The Amir's support for Qaradawi and his international delegation further shows that the Qatari leadership wants to appear in the forefront on righting the situation in Gaza.

-- Finally, by publicly postponing the Arab League/African Union Ministerial on Darfur and linking the postponement to UN Security Council debates in New York on Gaza the week of January 5, the leadership is making clear that Gaza comes first.

End Key Points and Comment.

SUPPORT FOR THE PALESTINIANS AT HOME...

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1. (U) Many of the estimated 15,000 people who attended the

January 1 rally at the Qatar Sports Club stadium to show their solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza carried placards saying, "Stop Killing Our Children." Children and adults waved Palestinian and Qatari flags. The Doha Youth Center, Qatar Charity, Qatar Student Network, and the Qatar Sports Club sponsored the event.

12. (U) Participants at the rally were encouraged to donate money to the Qatar Charity for humanitarian assistance to Gaza. The local cell phone provider, Q-Tel, sent all its subscribers text messages announcing the event. Some messages included the bank account information where residents unable to attend the rally could make donations for Gaza.

...AND ABROAD

13. (U) Following a January 3 meeting with the Amir, a delegation of the IUMS headed by prominent Al Jazeera imam Yousef Al-Qaradawi departed Qatar on one of the Amir's planes for meetings with leaders of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. According to Qaradawi, the delegation would urge leaders of these countries to sever their ties with Israel and ask for "emergency summits of the Arab League and Muslim countries so that they can have a united stand on the Zionist aggression." (Note: Qatar's Amir sought to host an emergency Arab League Summit in Doha on January 2, but other Arab League members did not agree.)

14. (U) Qaradawi reported that another primary objective of the visit was to lift the "blockade" imposed on Gaza since Hamas took control of the territory. Asked by a journalist

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why the delegation was not visiting prominent Muslim countries to the east of Qatar (such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia), Qaradawi said the delegation is focusing on countries "which are more influential."

15. (U) The delegation includes former Sudanese president Abdul Rahman Siwar Al-Zahab; former grand mufti of Egypt Nasr Farid Wasel; head of the Indonesian advisory council Noor Waheed Hedayat; former Jordanian minister of education Isaac Al-Farhan; and Islamic intellectuals Isam Al-Bashir of Sudan, Salman Al-Ouda and Abdullah Nasif of Saudi Arabia, Abdul Wahab Al-Dilami of Yemen, Ahmend Al-Raisouni of Morocco, and Ali Al-Qurradaghi of Qatar.

16. (U) Qaradawi added that the issue of closing the Israeli trade office in Doha was not raised in the meeting with the Amir, because the delegation does not "see the office affecting the pro-Palestinian policy of Qatar. If we saw such impact we would raise it, but Qatar is known for its strong ... stance on the Palestinian issue."

SUPPORTING THE PALESTINIANS TRUMPS DARFUR

17. (SBU) Citing the need for Qatar's Prime Minister (and Foreign Minister) Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani to travel to New York for UN discussions on Gaza, the GOQ postponed a January 4 meeting with foreign ministers of some Arab League and African Union countries to discuss next steps on Darfur. Qatar's mediation of the Darfur crisis has been a prominent fixture of its foreign policy for many weeks. Arab League Chief Amr Moussa and joint African Union-United Nations mediator for Darfur Djibril Bassole were to have attended the meetings.

LeBaron